

Southeast Fisheries Science Center
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November 1, 2006

TO : Jim Berkson,
Chief (acting), Sustainable Fisheries Division

FROM : Larry Beerkircher,
Pelagic Observer Program

SUBJECT: Third quarter (2006) observer coverage summary.

The Pelagic Observer Program (POP) achieved a 7.0% coverage rate for the third quarter period of 2006 (July 1 to September 30). Selection letters were sent by certified mail service (return receipt) on June 15, 2005 to 39 vessel permit holders (owners and/or operators) for notification of observer coverage. The POP had the responsibility of the regular coverage requirement in the Northwest Atlantic, including the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea. During this quarter the POP was not involved in any cooperative research projects.

Of special note, there was one (1) vessel (Monica) selected for coverage for the this quarter which left port and made 3 sets prior to June 30 (i.e. in Quarter 2). In addition, there were three vessels (Capt. Bob, Capt. Mike, and Seneca) selected for coverage for the this quarter which left port and made a total of 14 sets and associated hauls prior to October 1 (i.e. Quarter 4). For the purposes of this quarterly report, vessel effort of the June 30 set and the sets and associated hauls occurring on or before September 30, along with any incidental takes observed during this quarter period (number of sets observed, days at-sea, animals caught) will be included in this summary. Of the 21 vessels boarded and observed for quarter 3, one made multiple trips in order to complete their minimum effort requested. Overall, observers spent 223 days at sea, which resulted in 149 sets observed and a coverage rate of 7.0%. During the 22 observed trips (Table 1), set effort occurred in the geographical areas of the Gulf of Mexico (GOM), the Florida East Coast (FEC), the South Atlantic Bight (SAB), the Mid-Atlantic Bight (MAB), the Northeast Coastal Sea (NEC), and the Northeast Distant (NED).

Of the pelagic longline trips covered by observers under the 8% fleet requirement, a total of 116,298 hooks were fished. The total catch observed consisted of 5,671 fish representing 44 species of fish. The catch data was comprised of 930 swordfish, 473

bigeye tuna, 1752 yellowfin tuna, 18 bluefin tuna, 64 albacore tuna, 163 other tuna species, 245 dolphin fish (mahi), 83 wahoo, 228 billfish species, 424 other finfish (escolar, lancetfish, etc.), 520 skates/rays, 0 small coastal sharks, 161 large coastal sharks, 594 pelagic sharks, and 16 unidentified fish species. During the quarter, observers also recorded incidental takes of protected species (Table 2) which included 5 marine mammals (5-Pilot whale-alive), 39 sea turtles (10 leatherback-alive; 28 loggerhead-alive, 1 Kemp's Ridley-alive), and no(0) sea birds.

Although occasional communications by telephone and faxes do occur from owners of selected vessels prior to and during the quarter, in general, my staff and I continue to have to place calls to most of the vessel owners to determine fishing activities and port location of the vessels. My recommendation is for the SEFSC to suggest to the HMS-HQ office to send periodic notices via fax distribution as reminders to vessel permit holders of their responsible for contacting the POP office of their fishing activity when selected. Until this action is supported, much of the staff time will always be committed to calling marinas, fish dealers, and/or leaving messages on phone recorders in hopes of locating the vessels.

During the quarter, the POP did not place observers on 19 of the 39 vessels selected (49%; Table 3), thus reducing the target coverage of the POP office by 93 sets. Unfortunately, there were 4 vessels (14 sets) in which the owners reported their vessels as not fishing (damaged or tied to the dock), sold, or involved in another fishery. This could indicate a growing trend of the fishery. There were seven selected vessels listed in Table 3 as not participating primarily due to non-communication with the office. These vessels reduced the POP's coverage opportunities by a minimum of 39 sets, which, if observed, would have resulted in our attaining an overall eight percent (8%) coverage. Lack of communication with our office and lack of marine safety decals still affects our program the most in any quarterly coverage. In addition, observer accommodations or liferaft can have an impact. With these excuses from owners re-occurring each quarter and with many of the same vessels on a regular basis, my staff continues to emphasize that the Agency should seek other alternatives of collecting data from these vessels if regular participation in observer coverage cannot be enforced for the permit holder. Fortunately this quarter, many of the vessels that were covered provided more sets than were requested in the selection letters.

Another issue that possibly negatively impacted the POP coverage level was the loss of two highly experienced individually-contracted observers due to a management directive to not renew their contracts. These observers did not wish to accept the pay cut that would have resulted from their conversion over to the contracting company that supplies a portion (now, the majority) of POP observers. These observers had left the POP by the middle of July; the contracting company did not have qualified replacement

candidates available until mid August, and by the time these replacements had been trained (late August) and completed their security paperwork requirements with the contractor, it was near the end of September. Although no specific vessel can be identified as being not covered this quarter due to lack of an observer; there were many time periods when all POP observers were deployed on trips and therefore POP staff did not conscientiously engage in tracking down vessels to remind them of observer coverage. Further, the staff time that was dedicated to the training session for the replacement observers would normally be at least partially dedicated towards observer deployments.

In closing, neither the Turtle Take Estimates (TTE) nor the Net Mortality Ratio (NMR) mentioned in the 2004 Biological Opinion (BO) are provided in this report as the POP does not have the staffing expertise to conduct these analyses. In addition, the POP recorded no sawfish catches during the quarter; this species is not likely to occur in the pelagic environment. Although turtle handling workshops are being scheduled at various ports, observers have also been instructed to share their expertise of using the turtle handling gear. Additionally, on August 5, 2004, the NOAA-Fisheries implemented the regulations for vessels to have the turtle handling and release gear on board. Shortly after that date, the POP observers were provided a turtle gear checklist form issued by the Miami PR and given instructions to review the gear on each boat, fill out the checklist forms, and submit the forms with their data at the completion of the trip. In keeping with the BO reporting requirements from the POP office, observers filled out the turtle handling and release gear forms on 21 of the 22 third quarter covered vessels. Following two industry organized turtle gear workshops held in February and April of 2005, the presence of this gear required by the BO appears to be routine. Of the vessels selected and observed vessels in quarter 3, 91% (n=19) of the vessels had the equipment needed for removing gear from turtles in the water (at least 3 of 4 items aboard), and 91% had most of the equipment for removing gear if the turtle is boated (6 or more items aboard). Additionally, 62% of the selected vessels (n=13) also had the turtle tether aboard, which is voluntary at this time. A PDF document of the observer turtle gear forms will be posted on a secure site of the POP website. Finally, the cumulative number of unique vessels observed since the effective date of the sea turtle conservation regulations (July, 2004), now stands at 80 vessels covered (Table 4).

Attachments:

Tables 1,2,3, and 4.

cc: The POP office files; Gregg Houghaboom, NOAA-Fisheries SERO/OLE liaison.

Table 1: Regular coverage (8%) of the longline fleet. Number of vessels observed, areas of fishing activity, total hauls observed, and total days at-sea conducted by the SEFSC Miami Laboratory **POP** from July 1 to September 30, 2006.

Vessel Number	Vessel Name	Trip No.	Area	Total Hauls	Total Sea Days
597421	MONICA ¹	T02023	NEC	10	13
650401	SHARON G II	J02051	MAB	5	6
919799	BLUE SEA I	P01120	GOM	10	13
602041	PROVIDER ²	C02046	SAB	5	9
908223	SHADY LADY	A02027	MAB	5	8
925122	REDFIN	J02052	GOM	5	7
646506	JANICE ANN	J02053	FEC	7	10
609121	CAROL ANN	D04033	SAB	1	4
995485	SEA QUEEN III	P01121	GOM	11	14
596805	MARY ANN	C02047	NEC	6	9
1031845	DESTINY	D04034	NEC	10	13
510728	MISS SUZANNE	S02081	MAB	6	10
690722	SOUTHERN LADY	U03015	MAB	6	10
932650	ST PETER	Q02060	GOM	6	8
604915	FRANCES ANNE	TO2024	MAB	9	14
656259	KRISTIN LEE	S01082	FEC	9	12
507646	DAYTONA	J02054	GOM	13	17
907061	CAPT ROBINSON	P01122	GOM	7	11
532569	SENECA	D04035	NED	4	10
532569	SENECA ³	D04036	NED	11	17
929813	CAPT BOB ³	B03001	MAB	1	4
905679	CAPT MIKE ³	Q02061	GOM	2	4
TOTAL		22		149	223

19 vessels observed:

- 1) Vessel selected for Quarter 3 coverage, but due to early departure 3 sets were made in quarter 2, 2006.
- 2) Vessel selected for Quarter 2 2006, not covered then, but made voluntary trip this quarter.
- 3) Vessel's trip continued into Quarter 4 2006.

Table 2: Percent coverage (by sets), the incidental take of Protected Resource species (turtles, mammals, seabirds), and hook effort summarized by geographical area for July 1 to September 30, 2006 (A=Alive, D=Dead, LB=Leatherback, LH=Loggerhead, O=other)

AREA	TOTAL SETS OBSERVED	REQUIRED 8% COVERAGE	TURTLES A LB/LH/O	D	MAMMALS A	D	BIRDS A	D
CAR-1	0 (0%)	0	0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0
GOM-2	54 (7+%)	59	1/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0
FEC-3	16 (18+%)	7	0/ 0/1	0	0	0	0	0
SAB-4	6 (4+%)	11	0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0
MAB-5	32 (6+%)	41	0/ 3/0	0	4	0	0	0
NEC-6	26 (8+%)	24	4/13/0	0	1	0	0	0
NED-7	15 (4+%)	28	5/12/0	0	0	0	0	0
SAR-8	0 (0%)	0	0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0
NCA-9	0 (0%)	0	0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0
TUN-10	0 (0%)	0	0/ 0/0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	149 (7%)	170	10/28/1	0	5	0	0	0

Hook effort Summary:

<u>Area</u>	<u>Hook effort</u>
CAR	0
GOM	38,190
FEC	8,005
SAB	2,915
MAB	27,330
NEC	27,591
NED	12,267
SAR	0
TUN	0
TOTAL	116,298

Table 3: Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 3, 2006 (July 1 to September 30). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: **(1)**No bunk available;**(2)**Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity;**(3)** Lack of current CFVSE decal; **(4)**No communication with observer office/staff; **(5)**Not fishing (involved in another fishery);**(6)**Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and **(7)**other.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
AMY RENEE	MD4108BV	Reason 4. Certified letter received. Owner did not communicate with the POP office during quarter of selection. POP requested 2 sets for the quarter. Logbook submissions: Reported landings in July and August.
BOOKIE	539456	Reason 3 and 4. Certified letter received. Owner did not communicate with the POP office during quarter of selection. POP requested 14 sets for the quarter. Logbook submission: Vessel logbooks reported landings in July, August, and September.
CAP'N B	642921	Reason 6 and 7. Letter returned unclaimed but very late in quarter (August). POP checked with logbook team, who indicated this vessel was tied up and not fishing. Selection letter was not re-sent. POP requested 1 set for the quarter. Logbook submissions: No landings reports received for July, August, or September

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CAPT. DAVID	911431	Reason 6 and 7. Certified letter received. Owner indicated no captain or crew to fish vessel. Owner found a captain late in quarter and requested permission from POP to make a trip without observer so there would be room for owner to go. Observer deployed on very next trip (quarter 4, voluntary trip). POP requested 4 sets for the quarter.
CHARLESTON STAR	591301	Reason 3, 4, 6 and 7. Certified letter received. Owner called the POP office to indicate that his vessel had been out of the water for and would not fish until possibly August. There were no further communications from the vessel. Decal expired at the end of August. POP requested 3 sets for the quarter. Landinfs reported on 7/14/2006, 8/30/2006, 9/13/2006, and 9/20/2006.
DEFIANCE	630306	Reason 1. Certified letter received. Vessel is small; no bunk for an observer and no room to sleep on deck. POP requested 3 sets for the quarter. Logbook submissions: Landings reported for July, August, and September.

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KNOCK OUT	617018	Reason 1. Certified selection letter received. Owner indicated vessel does not have the room for an observer. POP made several attempts to have the vessel inspected by an observer but was unsuccessful; however, one observer had a chance to closely examine the vessel from the outside and expressed doubts as to the ability to find a place to sleep on this vessel. POP requested 2 sets for quarter. Logbook submissions: Landings reported for July, August, and September.
KRISTIN LYNN	NJ6497GE	Reason 5. Certified letter received by owner. Owner called the POP office to indicate vessel was involved in Scallop fishery until further notice. POP requested 2 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted a "No fishing report" for July, August, and September.
LINNEA C	665962	Reasons 6. Certified letter received by owner. Owner indicated vessel was under repairs for most of quarter. POP requested 9 sets for quarter. No landing information submitted.

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OUTLAW	643282	Reason 3, 6. Certified letter received by owner. Vessel owner reported vessel was not fishing until September. Owner then called in to schedule observer coverage, but by then the vessel's safety decal was expired. Vessel owner indicates he will take in observer in quarter 4. Pop requested 8 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted logbook forms for July and September.
SARAH BETH	608322	Reason 4. Certified letter received by owner. No communications with the POP office during the quarter. Pop requested 6 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Landings reported for July, August, and September.
SEA ANGEL	926754	Reasons 7. Unknown if letter was received by owner. Certified letter returned unclaimed. Letter resent by regular mail; was never returned by USPS, but no proof that permit holder received letter. Other sources indicate vessel owner/captain is going through a divorce and is living on his vessel, and moving around frequently. POP requested 8 sets for quarter. Landings reported for September.

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and (7)other.

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SEA BORN	943313	Reason 4,5. Certified letter received by owner. Owner did not communicate with the POP staff during the quarter. Pop requested 2 sets during the quarter. Logbook submission: No information is available; no landings reported, no "no fishing" reports received.
ST PAUL PETER	929437	Reasons 4 and 5. Certified letter received by owner. Owner did not communicate with the POP staff during the quarter until 9/21, which was probably in response to a quarter 4 selection letter mailed to him on 9/15. At that time he indicated the vessel had not been fishing and was for sale. POP requested 6 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Landings reported in September.
STAR SEA	991695	Reason 6. Certified letter received by owner. Owner sent in vessel response form indicating that vessel was under repair but would be fishing soon. No further communications came from owner, however, landings information indicates this vessel made one trip during Quarter 3. Pop requested 8 sets during the quarter. Logbook submission: Landings reported in September.

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THUAN LOI	985618	Reasons 3,6, 7. Certified letter not received (green card not returned, letter not returned). Owner communicated with a POP observer to indicate the vessel had been sold. POP requested 7 sets for quarter. Landings reported on 8/12/2006, 8/26/2006, and 9/29/2006.
WATERSPORT	618782	Reason 7. Certified letter received. Owner communicated with the POP office to indicate the vessel is involved in the shark bottom longline fishery, but would call when pelagic fishing. During September, the POP deployed an observer to the vessel's port, but the approach of tropical storm Florence, delayed the vessel's departure long enough that the phase of the moon was not conducive to pelagic fishing, and so they went back to bottom longlining. Owner is very cooperative with POP program in observer coverage. POP requested 2 set for quarter. Logbook submission: Landings reported for July, August, and September.

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<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
WHITEWATER II	902748	Reasons 7. Certified letter received. Owner did not communicate with the POP until prompted on September 8 th , and then

only to communicate were the vessel was fishing. At that point the POP had no observers available for deployment, so did not pursue communications. POP requested 4 sets for quarter. Vessel is on selection list for fourth quarter 2006. Landing information: landings 8/8/2006.

WHITEWATER

1026595

Reasons 7. Certified letter received. Communications with Captain did occur early in Quarter 3, but no observer was available for vessel departure. No further communications were made with the POP until prompted on September 8th, and then only to communicate were the vessel was fishing (out of Newfoundland, CA). Again at that point the POP had no observers available for deployment, so did not pursue communications. POP requested 14 sets for quarter. Vessel is on selection list for fourth quarter 2006. Landing information: landings 8/8/2006.

Table 4: The POP coverage completed aboard the pelagic longline fleet by quarter and year since the publication of the 2004 Biological Opinion. The number of trips observed include vessels that are covered multiple times during a quarter. The number of unique vessels observed represents those vessels only covered once by an observer during a quarter and year.

Quarter	Year	No. of Vessels Selected	No. of Trips Observed	No. of Unique Vessels Observed
3	2004	44	29	29
4	2004	30	28	14
1	2005	34	26	12
2	2005	45	22	9
3	2005	41	19	7
4	2005	28	14	1
1	2006	31	20	4
2	2006	33	23	2
3	2006	39	22	2
Cumulative Totals			203	80
